

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Vice President

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REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN  
AT 45TH MUNICH CONFERENCE ON SECURITY POLICY

Hotel Bayerischer Hof  
Munich, Germany

12:49 P.M. (Local)

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much. Ladies and gentleman, it's an honor to be back in Munich. I've attended this conference many times as a United States senator, and three of my congressional colleagues are here with me today. But I am honored to be back here, as well, as the Vice President of the United States, representing a new administration and, hopefully, a new day.

Today I am especially honored to represent this administration. And we've gone through the oldest of our traditions: that is the peaceful transfer of power. And now, I bring the regrets of two friends who are usually here. But because we are still grappling with legislation relating to our so-called stimulus package to deal with our economic issues -- both Senators John McCain and John Kerry were hoping to join my three House colleagues here today, they are usually here, but they send their regrets.

I come to Europe on behalf of a new administration, and an administration that's determined to set a new tone not only in Washington, but in America's relations around the world. That new tone is rooted in a strong bipartisanship to meet these common challenges. And we recognize that these challenges, the need to meet them, is not an opportunity -- not a luxury, but it's an absolute necessity. While every new beginning is a moment of hope, this moment -- for America and the countries represented in this room -- it is fraught with some considerable concern and peril.

In this moment, our obligation to our fellow citizens is to -- in our view -- put aside the petty and political notion that -- to reject the zero sum mentalities and rigid ideologies, and to listen to and learn from one another, and to work together for a common prosperity and security of all of us assembled in this room. That's what, in our view, this moment demands. And that's what this new administration is determined to do.

For 45 years, this conference has brought together Americans and Europeans -- and, in recent years, leaders from beyond the Transatlantic community -- to think through matters of our physical security. But this year, more than ever before, we know that our physical security and our economic security are indivisible. We are all confronting a serious threat to our economic security that could further spread instability and erode the progress we've made in improving the lives of all our citizens.

In the United States -- like many of you -- we're taking aggressive action to stabilize our financial systems, to jumpstart our economy, and, hopefully, lay a new foundation for growth in the 21st century. Working with the Congress, we'll make strategic investments that create and save we believe 3 to 4 million jobs, and in the process, boost our competitiveness in the long run.

Our plan includes doubling the production of alternative energy over the next three years; computerizing our citizens' medical records to drive down cost; equipping tens of thousands of our schools and colleges with 21st century classrooms, laboratories and libraries; expanding the broadband across America; and investing once again in science, research, technology -- all the things that spur innovation. We're looking -- we're also working to stabilize our financial institutions by injecting considerable amounts of capital, purchasing some assets and guaranteeing others. These remedies are going to have an impact, as you all know, far beyond our shores, just as the measures all of you are taking will be felt beyond your borders, as well.

And because of that, to the greatest extent possible, we're going to have to cooperate to make sure that our actions are complementary, and to do our utmost to combat this global crisis. The United States is trying to do its part. And President Obama looks forward to taking our message to the G20 meeting in London in April.

And even as we grapple with an economic crisis, we're also -- have to contend with a war in Afghanistan now in its eighth year, and a war in Iraq well into its sixth year. And we have to recognize, as mentioned by both the Chancellor and President Sarkozy earlier today, that there are other forces that are shaping this new century: The spread of weapons of mass destruction and dangerous diseases, endemic disease; a growing gap between the rich and poor; ethnic animosity in failed states; and a rapidly warming planet and uncertain supplies of energy, food, water. The challenges to freedom and security from radical fundamentalism must be added to that list, as well.

In meeting these challenges, the United States will be guided by this principle -- and the principle is: There is no conflict between our security and our ideals. We believe they are mutually reinforcing.

The force of arms won our independence, and throughout our history the force of arms has protected our freedom. That will not change. But the very moment we declared our war of independence, at that moment we laid out to the world the values behind our revolution and the conviction that our policies must be informed, as we said at the time, by a "decent respect for the opinions of mankind."

Our Founders understood then, and the United States believes now, that the example of our power must be matched by the power of our example. And that is why our administration rejects a false choice between our safety and our ideals. America will vigorously defend our security and our values, and in doing so we believe we'll all be more secure.

As hard as we try, I know -- I know -- that we're likely to fall short of our ideals in the future, just as we have in the past. But I commit to you, this administration will strive every day -- every day -- to honor the values that animate American democracy and, I might add, that bind us to all of you in this room.

America will not torture. We will uphold the rights of those who we bring to justice. And we will close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay.

But tough choices lie ahead. As we seek a lasting framework for our common struggle against extremism, we'll have

to work cooperatively with nations around the world -- and we'll need your help. We'll need your help. For example, we will ask others to take responsibility for some of those now in Guantanamo, as we determine to close it. Our security is shared. And so, too, I respectfully suggest, is our responsibility to defend it.

That's the basis upon which we want to build a new approach to the challenges of this century. America will do more, but America will -- that's the good news. The bad news is America will ask for more from our partners, as well.

Here's what we'll do, and what we hope our partners will consider. First, we'll work in a partnership whenever we can, and alone only when we must. The threats we face have no respect for borders. No single country, no matter how powerful, can best meet these threats alone. We believe international alliances and organizations do not diminish America's power -- we believe they help advance our collective security, economic interests and our values.

So we'll engage. We'll listen. We'll consult. America needs the world, just as I believe the world needs America. But we say to our friends that the alliances, treaties and international organizations we build must be credible and they must be effective. That requires a common commitment not only to listen and live by the rules, but to enforce the rules when they are, in fact, clearly violated.

Such a bargain is the bargain we seek. Such a bargain can be at the heart of our collective efforts to convince Iran, for example, to forego the development of nuclear weapons. The Iranian people are a great people; the Persian civilization is a great civilization. But Iran has acted in ways that are not conducive to peace in the region or to the prosperity of its own people. Its illicit nuclear program is but one of those manifestations.

Our administration is reviewing our policy toward Iran, but this much is clear: We will be willing to talk. We'll be willing to talk to Iran and to offer a very clear choice: Continue down the current course and there will be continued pressure and isolation; abandon the illicit nuclear program and your support for terrorism, and there will be meaningful incentives.

Second, we'll strive to act preventively, not preemptively, to avoid whenever possible, or wherever possible the choice of last resort between the risks of war and the dangers of inaction. We'll draw upon all the elements of our power -- military and diplomatic, intelligence and law enforcement, economic and cultural -- to stop crises from occurring before they are in front of us. In short, we're going to attempt to recapture the totality of America's strength, starting with diplomacy.

On his second full day in office, President Obama, went to our State Department, where he stressed the centrality of diplomacy in our national security. The commitment can be seen in his appointments, starting with the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. It can be seen in the President's decision to name two of America's most tenacious diplomats -- Senator George Mitchell and Ambassador Richard Holbrooke -- to contend with two of the world's most urgent and vexing and complex challenges: the need for a secure, just, and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and the imperative of stopping the mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan from providing a haven for terrorists.

In both these efforts, America seeks your partnership. Senator Mitchell just completed his first trip to the Middle East. Above all, he went to listen. In the near term, we must consolidate the cease-fire in Gaza by working with Egypt and others to stop smuggling, and developing an international relief and reconstruction effort that strengthens the Palestinian Authority, and not Hamas. Neither of these goals can be accomplished without close collaboration among the United States, Europe, and our Arab partners.

Then, we must lay the foundation for a broader peacemaking effort. In the past -- well, look at it this way -- it's long time passed for us to secure a just, two-state solution. We will work to achieve it. And we'll work to defeat extremists who perpetuate the conflict. And in building on positive elements of the Arab Peace Initiative put forward by Saudi Arabia, we'll work toward a broader regional peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and we'll responsibly draw down our forces that are in Iraq in the process.

The United States will continue to work for a stable Afghanistan that's not a haven for terrorists. We look forward -- we look forward to sharing that commitment with the

government and the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and with all of our allies and partners, because a deteriorating situation in the region poses a security threat not just to the United States, but I would suggest somewhat presumptuously, to every one of you assembled in this room.

President Obama has ordered a strategic review of our policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan to make sure that our goals are clear, and that they are achievable. As we undertake that review, we seek ideas and input from you and all of our partners. And we genuinely seek those ideas. I've already had bilateral meetings. I'll have the opportunity to meet with the President of France and others this afternoon. I had an opportunity to meet with the Chancellor this morning. We are sincere in seeking your counsel.

As we undertake this review, there's a lot at stake. The result must be a comprehensive strategy for which we all take responsibility -- that brings together our civilian and military resources, that prevents terrorists a safe haven, that helps the Afghan people develop the capacity to secure their own future. But no strategy for Afghanistan, in my humble opinion, can succeed without Pakistan. We must all strengthen our cooperation with the people and government of Pakistan, help them stabilize their Tribal Areas, promote economic development and opportunity throughout their country. In the case of my government, we feel it's urgent to move from a relationship that was transactional to one that is based upon a long-term relationship.

Thirdly, America will extend a hand to those who, as the President said, will unclench their fist. The United States of America does not believe, our administration does not believe, in a clash of civilizations; there is nothing inevitable about that. We do see a shared struggle against extremism -- and we'll do everything in our collective power to help the forces of tolerance prevail.

In the Muslim world, a small -- and I believe a very small -- number of violent extremists are beyond the call of reason. We will, and we must, defeat them. But hundreds of millions of hearts and minds in the Muslim world share the values we hold dearly. We must reach them. President Obama has made clear that he will seek a new way forward based on mutual interest and mutual respect. It was not an accident that he gave his very

first interview as President of the United States to Al Arabiya. That was not an accident.

To meet the challenges of this new century, defense and diplomacy are necessary. But quite frankly, ladies and gentlemen, they are not sufficient. We also need to wield development and democracy, two of the most powerful weapons in our collective arsenals. Poor societies and dysfunctional states, as you know as well as I do, can become breeding grounds for extremism, conflict and disease. Non-democratic nations frustrate the rightful aspirations of their citizens and fuel resentment.

Our administration has set an ambitious goal to increase foreign assistance, to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015, to help eliminate the global educational deficit, and to cancel the debt of the world's poorest countries; to launch a new Green Revolution that produces sustainable supplies of food, and to advance democracy not through the imposition of force from the outside, but by working with moderates in government and civil society to build those institutions that will protect that freedom -- quite frankly, the only thing that will guarantee that freedom.

We also are determined to build a sustainable future for our planet. We are prepared to once again begin to lead by example. America will act aggressively against climate change and in pursuit of energy security with like-minded nations.

Our administration's economic stimulus package, for example, includes long-term investments in renewable energy. And we believe that's merely a down payment. The President has directed our Environmental Protection Agency to review how we regulate emissions, start a process to raise fuel efficiency, appoint a climate envoy -- and all in his first week in office, to demonstrate his commitment.

As America renews our emphasis on diplomacy, development and democracy, and preserving our planet, we will ask our allies to rethink some of their own approaches -- including their willingness to use force when all else fails.

When it comes to radical groups that use terror as a tool, radical states who harbor extremists, undermine peace and seek or spread weapons of mass destruction, and regimes that systematically kill or ethnically cleanse their own people, we

must stand united and use every means at our disposal to end the threat that they pose.

None of us can deny or escape the new threats of the 21st century. Nor can we escape the responsibility to meet them. And we are not unmindful in the United States how difficult it is to communicate these notions to our public who don't want to hear much of what needs to be said.

Two months from now, the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will gather to celebrate the 60th year of this Alliance. This Alliance has been the cornerstone of our common security since the end of World War II. It has anchored the United States in Europe and helped forge a Europe whole and free. Together we made a pact, a pact to safeguard the freedom of our people founded on the principles and the documents referring to democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. We made a commitment to cooperate, to consult, to act with resolve when the principles we defended are challenged.

There is much to celebrate. But we there's much more to be done. We must recommit our shared security and renew NATO, so that its success in the 20th century is matched in the 21st century.

NATO's core purpose remains the collective defense of its members. But faced with new threats, new realities, we need a new resolve to meet them and new capabilities to succeed. Our Alliance must be better equipped to help stop the spread of the world's most dangerous weapons, to tackle terrorism and cybersecurity, to expand the writ of energy security, and to act in and out of area more effectively. We continue to develop -- we will continue to develop missile defense to counter the growing Iranian capability, provided the technology is proven and it is cost-effective. We'll do so in consultation with you, our NATO allies, and with Russia.

As we embark on this renewal project -- as we like to think of it -- the United States, like other allies, would warmly welcome, and we do warmly welcome, the decision by France to fully cooperate in NATO structures. That's the main reason the President got our speech. (Laughter.) You were supposed to say nicer things about me when you got the speech, Mr. President. (Laughter.) That's a joke. (Laughter.)



In a recent discussion with President Sarkozy, President Obama underscored his strong support for France's full participation in NATO, should France wish it. France is a founding member of NATO and a major contributor to its operation. We would expect France's new responsibilities to reflect the significance of its contributions throughout NATO's history, and to strengthen the European role within the Alliance.

We also support the further strengthening of European defense, an increased role for the European Union in preserving peace and security, a fundamentally stronger NATO-EU partnership, and a deeper cooperation with countries outside the Alliance who share our common goals and principles.

The United States rejects the notion that NATO's gain is Russia's loss, or that Russia's strength is NATO's weakness. The last few years have seen a dangerous drift in relations between Russia and the members of our Alliance. It is time -- to paraphrase President Obama -- it's time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia.

Our Russian colleagues long ago warned about the rising threat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Today, NATO and Russia can, and should, cooperate to defeat this common enemy. We can and should cooperate to secure loose nuclear weapons and materials to prevent their spread, to renew the verification procedures in the START Treaty, and then go beyond existing treaties to negotiate deeper cuts in both our arsenals. The United States and Russia have a special obligation to lead the international effort to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world.

We will not agree with Russia on everything. For example, the United States will not -- will not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. We will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence. It will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own alliances. But the United States and Russia can disagree and still work together where our interests coincide. And they coincide in many places.

This conference started in the shadow of the Cold War. Now it takes place in a new century with new threats. As one great poet, an Irish poet, once wrote about another

circumstance, he said: "All is changed, changed utterly: a terrible beauty has been born." Well, all changed, changed utterly. And we must change, too, while remaining true to the principles upon which this Alliance was founded. And we must have the common courage and commitment of those who came before us to work together, to build together, to stand together. In sharing ideals and searching for partners in a more complex world, America and Europeans still look to one another before they look to anyone else. Our partnership has benefitted us all. It's time -- it's time to renew it. And President Obama and I look forward to doing just that.

Thank you for your indulgence. (Applause.)

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1:10 P.M. (Local)